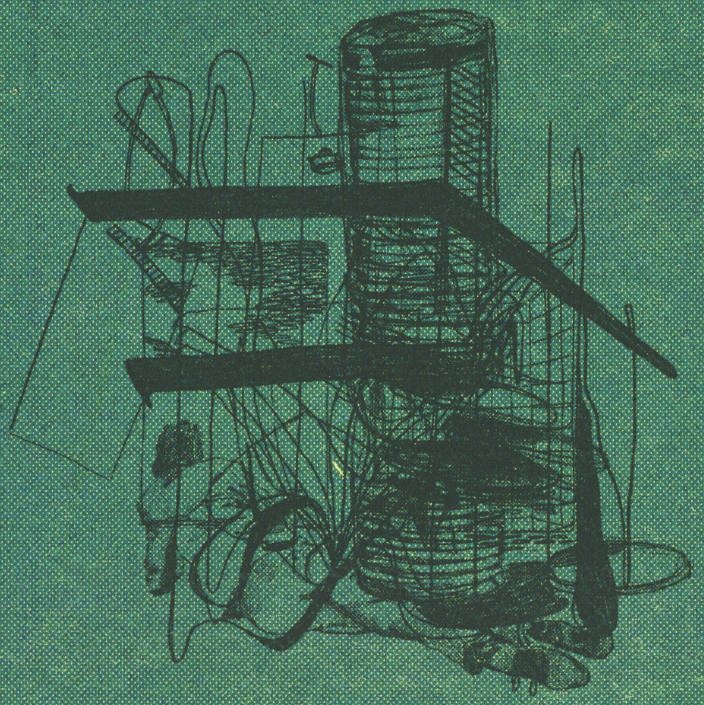

Den Skandinaviske
Designhøjskole

How do we design for under-consumption?

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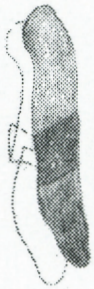


Fashion and textiles have always captivated, amazed, provoked, and fascinated. It is also an industry that drives gross consumption with a catastrophic impact on the environment. At The Scandinavian Design College we treat artistic and creative proficiency; general education; and a respect for the natural world; and our global community as a holistic whole.

Last August the college had the opportunity to put this approach into practice. We invited thought leaders from across the creative and academic landscape to the symposium "How do we design for under-consumption?" to discuss how we collectively can invent new tools and methods to drive the fashion and textile industry towards lower consumption and a significant reduction of its environmental burden.

Our hope is for the symposium to be the beginning of a movement, a budding community coming together to talk and practise real life practical solutions. We believe it is through the sharing of skills, knowledge and creativity, that great impact can be made, both in the short and the long term. Together we can create design tools, that are the results of community and of a generosity of spirit. These tools can be a catalyst for designs and conversations for all of us to share.

Let this be our ambition: to foster a belief and determination that we can develop a fashion and textile industry that continue to captivate, amaze, provoke and fascinate us, but with much less negative impact on nature and its resources.

Our thanks go to Anders Andersen, whose help has been invaluable in defining both the symposium and this publication.

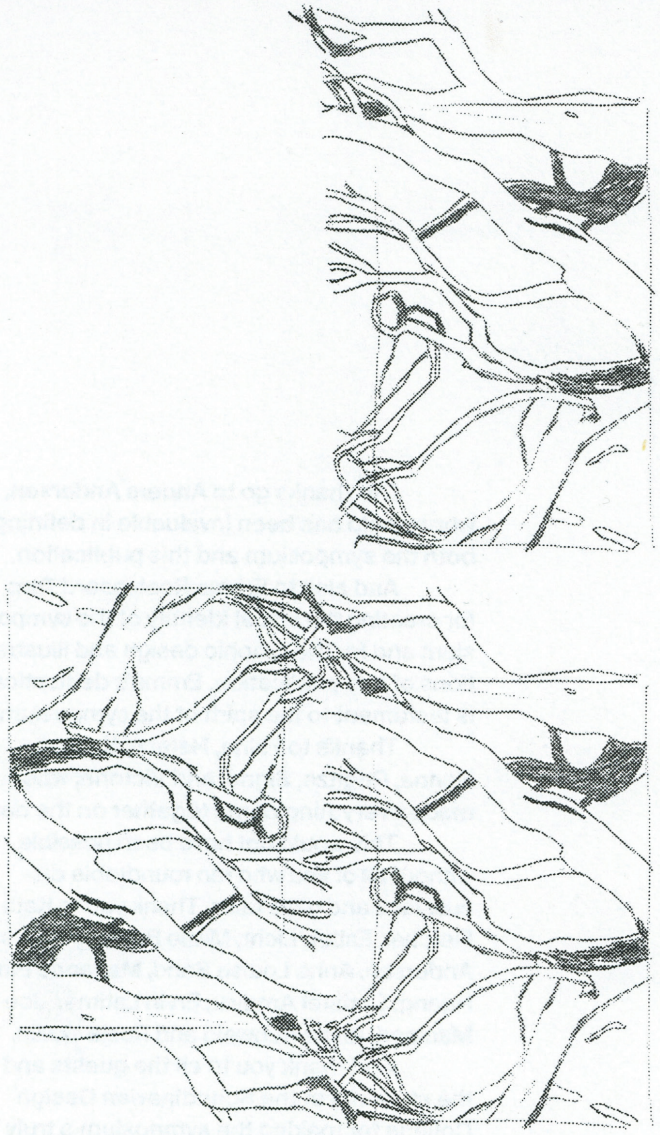
And also to Emma Roelsgaard Torp for creating the visual identity of the symposium and for the graphic design and illustrations of this publication. Emma's dedication is testament to the spirit of the symposium.

Thanks to Filina, Helene, Katrine, Nanna, Regitze, Signe, and Victoria, who made everything come together on the day.

This would not have been possible without all of you who ran roundtable discussions and gave talks. Thank you to Kate Fletcher, Esben Licht, Marie Busck, Anders Andersen, Anne Louise Band, Marianne Ping Huang, Christel Arnevik, Ervin Latimer, Joe Macleod, Rikke Ruhwald and Rosie Wallin.

And thank you to all the guests and the students at the Scandinavian Design College for making the symposium a truly unique day.

Merete Østergaard
Principal, Scandinavian Design College



This publication was created out of the passion of everyone who took part in the symposium "How do we design for under-consumption?". We recorded every conversation from the round table talks, every presentation, every Q&A. From many pages of transcriptions we lifted words of wisdom, words of hope, words of despair, words of experience with all opinions equally valid. All these voices then came together in one text, from which this work was created.

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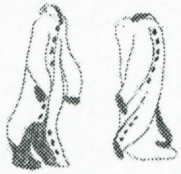

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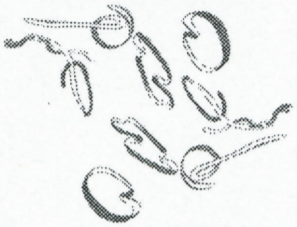

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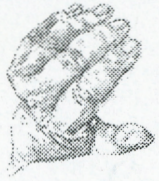

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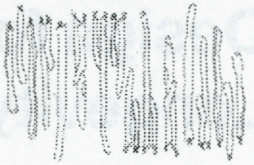

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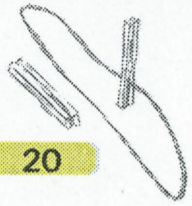

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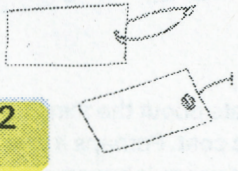

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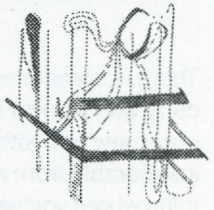

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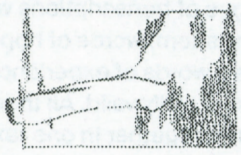

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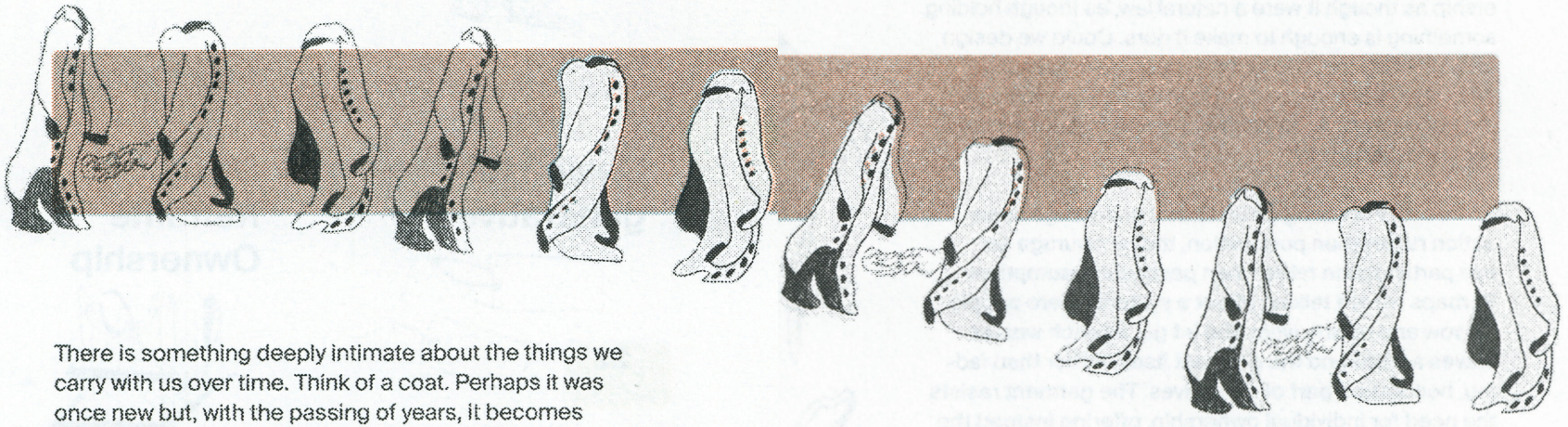
Design for Systemic Change

Design for Emotional Longevity



There is something deeply intimate about the things we carry with us over time. Think of a coat. Perhaps it was once new but, with the passing of years, it becomes inseparable from moments of its life. How the fabric folds where you've hung it from a hook, the faint scent that lingers from evenings spent outdoors. Over time, it becomes interwoven with the life of its owner accruing meaning with each stitch, each repair. Emotional longevity is this gradual accumulation of meaning: it is far more powerful than durability alone.

Try designing not for immediate impact, but for slow, subtle attachment. A garment should evolve, not just with age, but with the life it leads alongside its wearer. Design for intimacy, so creating not merely objects, but companions, things which, like old friends, grow more treasured over time.

. . . design a connection with the person that you're designing for...

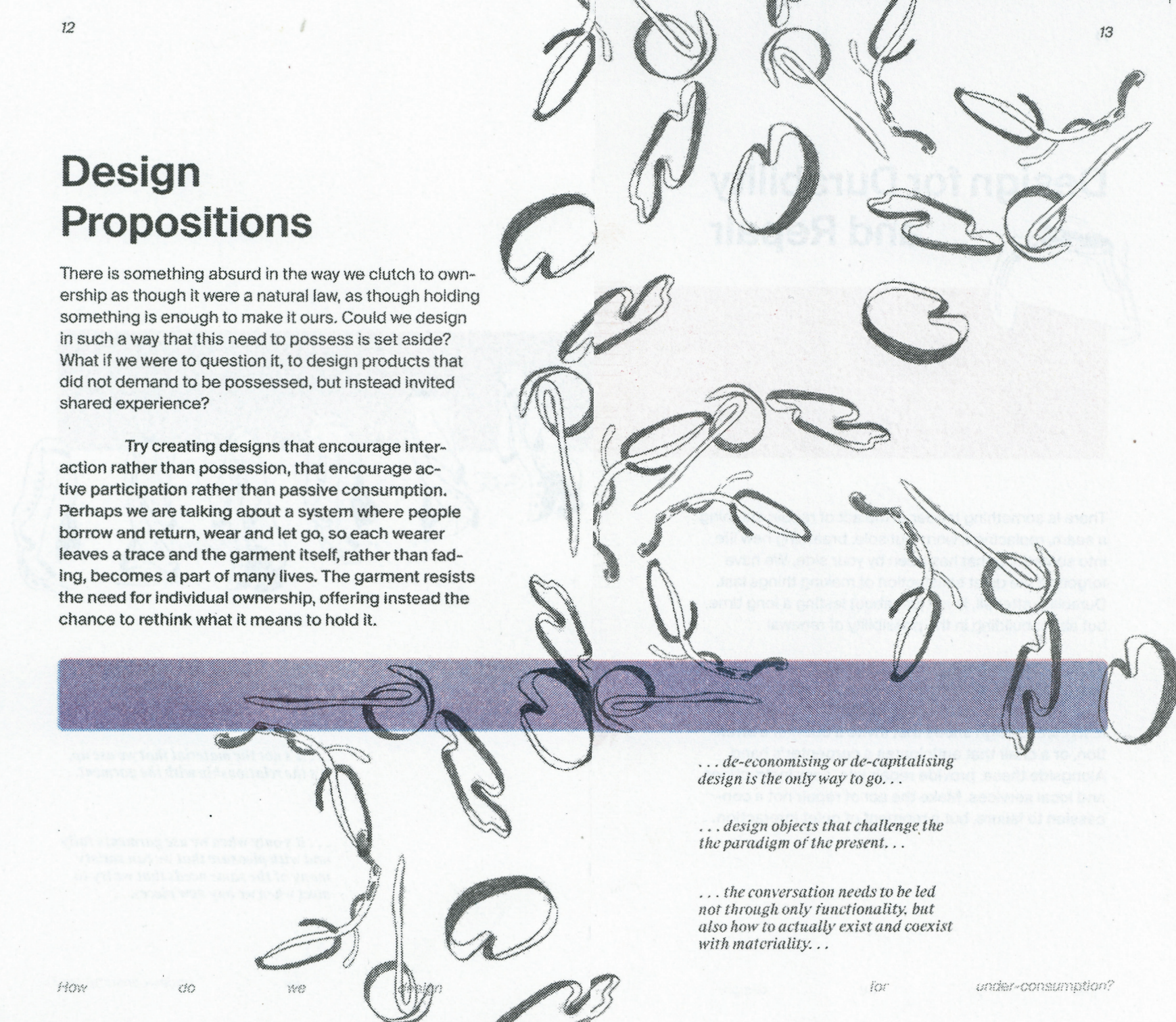
. . . it's not the material that we use up, it's the relationship with the garment. . .

. . . it's only when we use garments fully and with pleasure that we can satisfy many of the same needs that we try to meet when we buy new pieces. . .

Design Propositions

There is something absurd in the way we clutch to ownership as though it were a natural law, as though holding something is enough to make it ours. Could we design in such a way that this need to possess is set aside? What if we were to question it, to design products that did not demand to be possessed, but instead invited shared experience?

Try creating designs that encourage interaction rather than possession, that encourage active participation rather than passive consumption. Perhaps we are talking about a system where people borrow and return, wear and let go, so each wearer leaves a trace and the garment itself, rather than fading, becomes a part of many lives. The garment resists the need for individual ownership, offering instead the chance to rethink what it means to hold it.



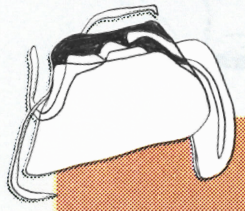
. . . de-economising or de-capitalising design is the only way to go. . .

. . . design objects that challenge the the paradigm of the present. . .

. . . the conversation needs to be led not through only functionality, but also how to actually exist and coexist with materiality. . .

How do we design for under-consumption?

Design for Durability and Repair



There is something tender in the act of repair; stitching a seam, replacing a worn-out sole, breathing new life into something that has been by your side. We have forgotten the quiet satisfaction of making things last. Durability, after all, is not just about lasting a long time, but about building in the possibility of renewal.

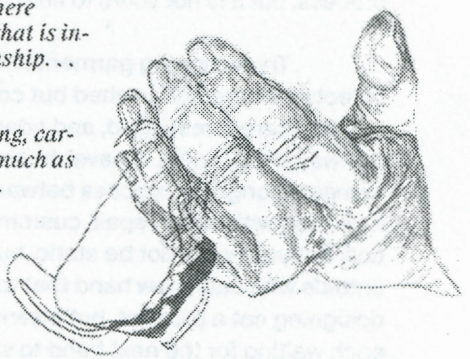
Try designing objects that anticipate wear, that offer the possibility of renewal. Create something that is not just durable but an object that resists obsolescence. Design shoes that invite a cobbler's attention, or a chair that anticipates a carpenter's hand. Alongside these, provide repair kits, easy instructions, and local services. Make the act of repair not a concession to failure, but a moment of quiet interaction.

. . . it's something that's in your hands, it's not something that can be read in a book. . .

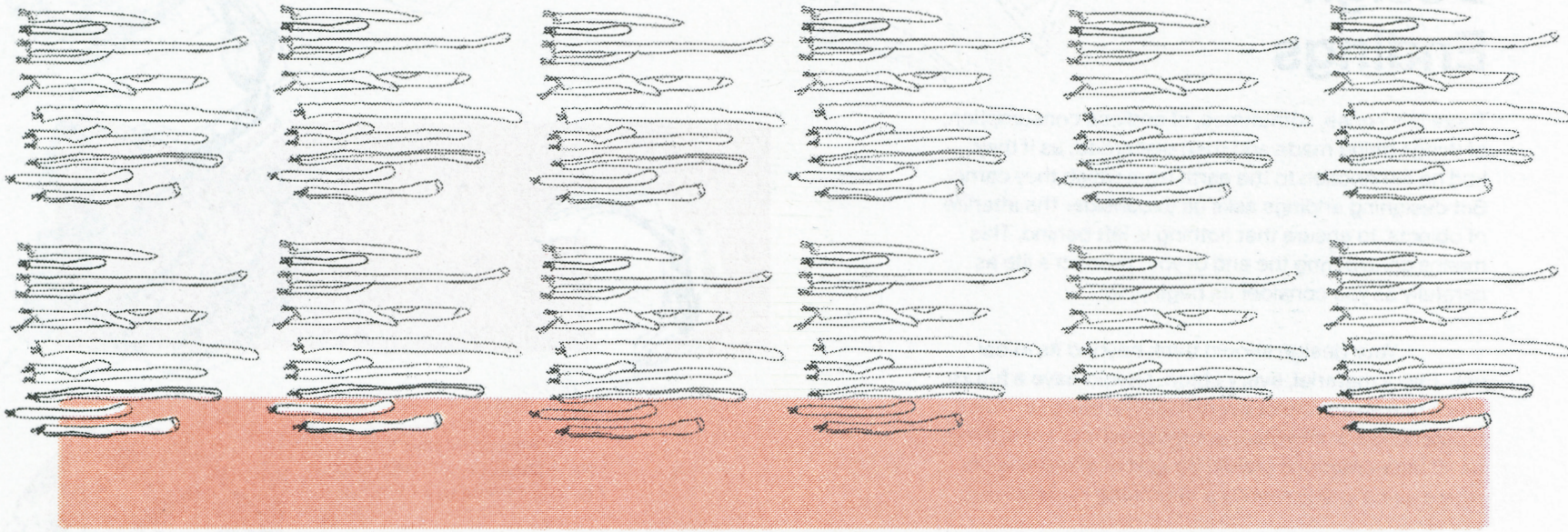
. . . in order to really engage with the things that we've already got, we first need to use them time and time again. . .

. . . design a world where design is something that is ingrained in craftsmanship. . .

. . . things need tending, caring for and using as much as they need creating. . .



Design for Process



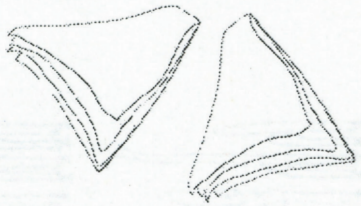
We often think of design as a finished act, the moment when the product is complete, ready to be used. But perhaps the more meaningful work begins after the object leaves your hands. To design is to initiate that process, but it is not yours to finish.

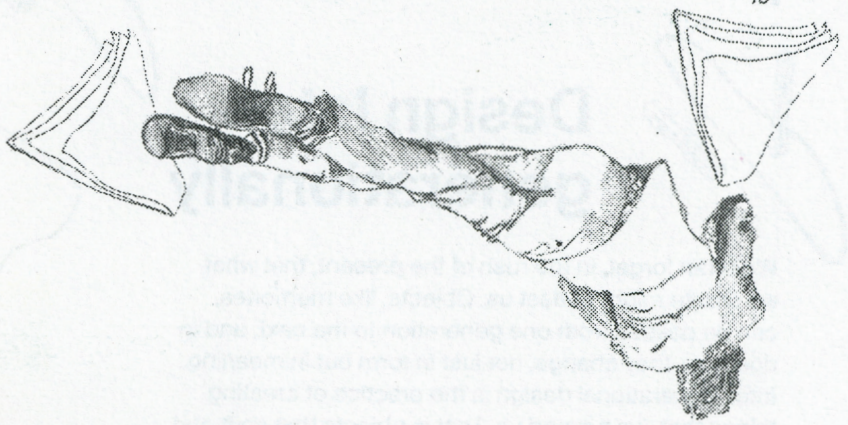
Try designing garments that invite change, objects that are not finished but continue to evolve. It can be altered, reshaped, and adapted over time. In this way, the product is never truly complete; it becomes an ongoing process between user and object. It evolves with every repair, customisation, or adaptation. Let your work not be static, but fluid, a story that unfolds with each new hand that touches it. You are designing not a product, but a series of possibilities, each waiting for the next hand to shape it.

. . . a good story is the story you start finishing in your head, but then it goes somewhere else, and ends up surprising you. Can a product do that? . .

. . . we're not abandoning fashion and design intelligence by shifting away from designing new goods out into the marketplace but instead what we're doing is exercising this design intelligence in a completely different way. . .

. . .think about engaging a user rather than attracting a consumer. . .

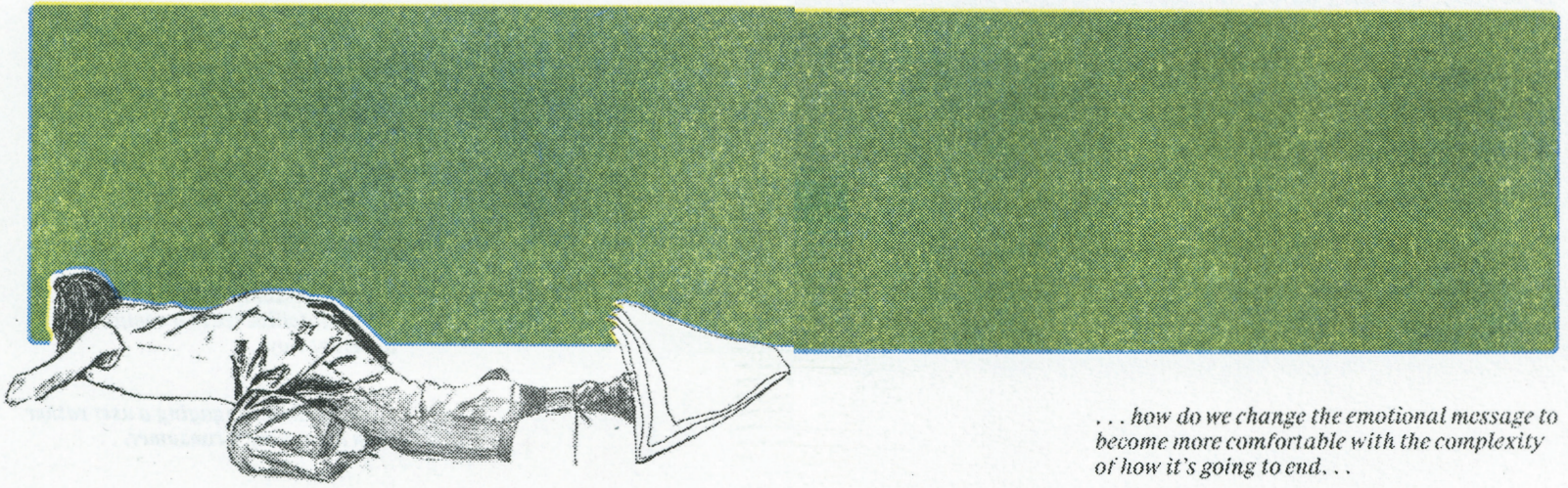




Design Endings

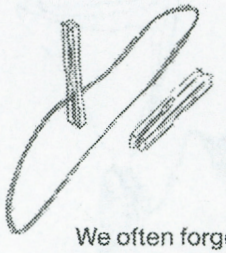
There is a sense, sometimes, of endless consumption; of things being made and then discarded, as if they had no connection to the earth from which they came. But designing endings asks us to consider the afterlife of objects, to ensure that nothing is left behind. This means considering the end of your product's life as carefully as you consider its beginning.

Your design should think beyond its initial use. Every material, every stitch, should have a future. Think of the afterlife of every material you use. Can it be composted, recycled, or reshaped into something new? Your creations should be part of a larger cycle, where every end is merely a beginning in disguise.



. . . how do we change the emotional message to become more comfortable with the complexity of how it's going to end. . .

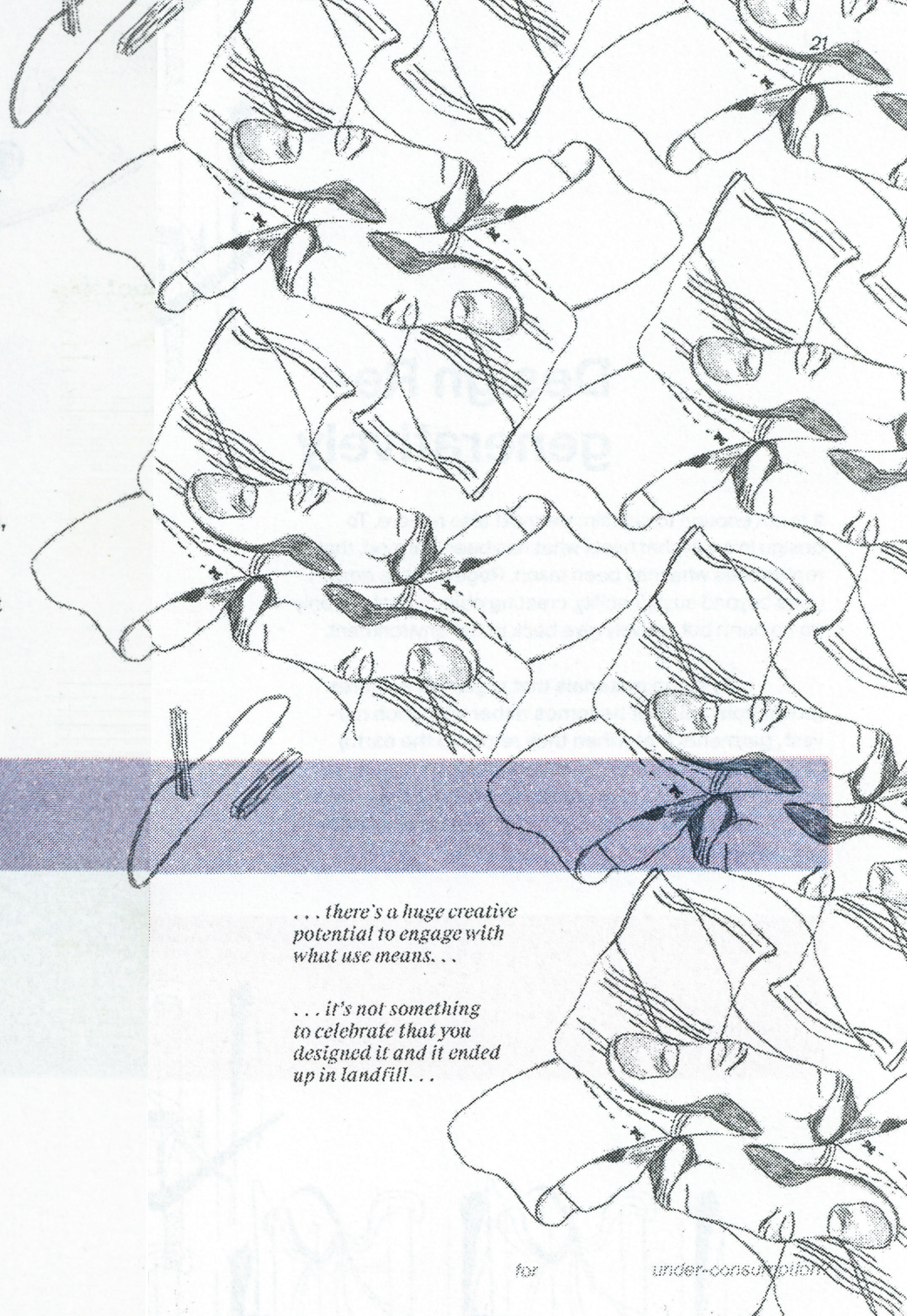
How do we design for under-consumption?



Design Inter-generationally

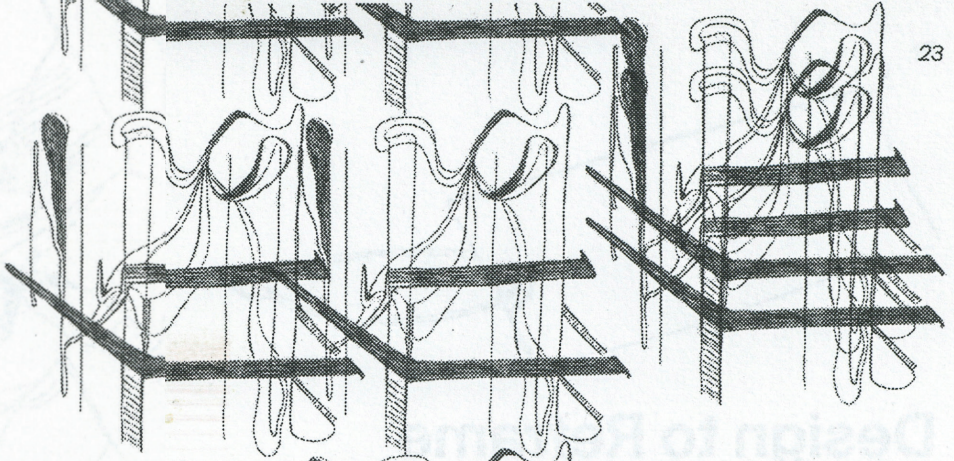
We often forget, in the rush of the present, that what we create might outlast us. Objects, like memories, can be passed from one generation to the next, and in doing so, they change, not just in form but in meaning. Inter-generational design is the practice of creating things that live beyond us. That is objects that shift and change with each new hand they find themselves in.

Try designing with the confidence that your piece will be reinterpreted, restored, and passed down, as if each user were adding their own chapter to a larger, ongoing tale. Each iteration becomes a new layer in the history of the object, a continuation of what came before. It is not about permanence, but about transformation across time, a dialogue between past and future. It is a way of designing that acknowledges the layers of time, the way life accumulates in objects.



. . . there's a huge creative potential to engage with what use means. . .

. . . it's not something to celebrate that you designed it and it ended up in landfill. . .



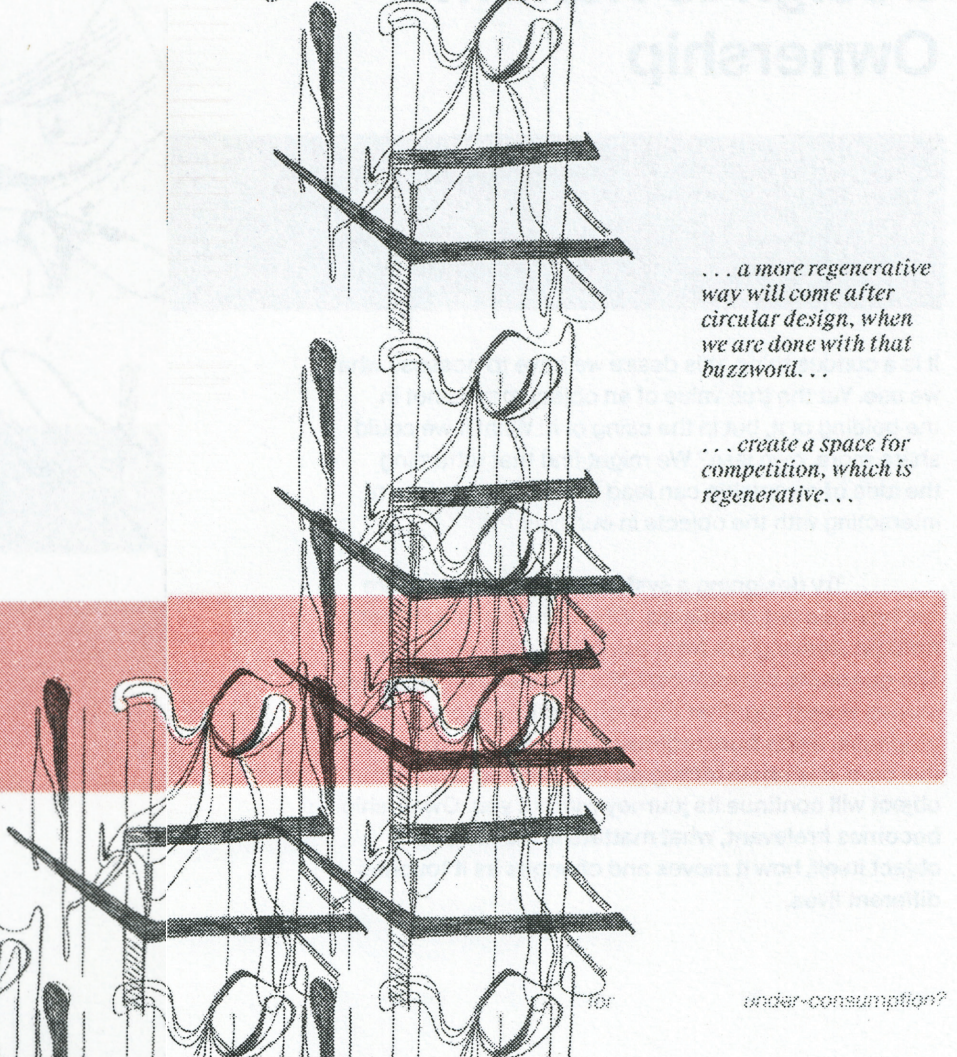
Design Re-generatively

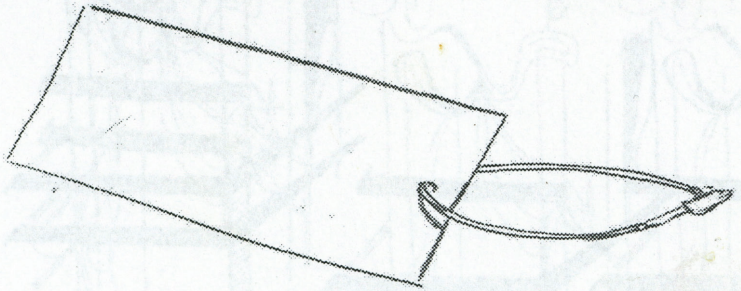
It is not enough to sustain; we must also restore. To design in a way that heals what has been harmed, that replenishes what has been taken. Regenerative design goes beyond sustainability, creating objects that not only do no harm but actively give back to the environment.

Try using materials that regenerate. Fibres grown from soil that becomes richer with each harvest, garments that (when they return to the earth) nourish it, not deplete it. Let your designs be acts of restoration and let your creations be more than neutral. Think of your designs as agents of renewal not just of fashion or function, but of life itself.

. . . a more regenerative way will come after circular design, when we are done with that buzzword. . .

. . . create a space for competition, which is regenerative. . .



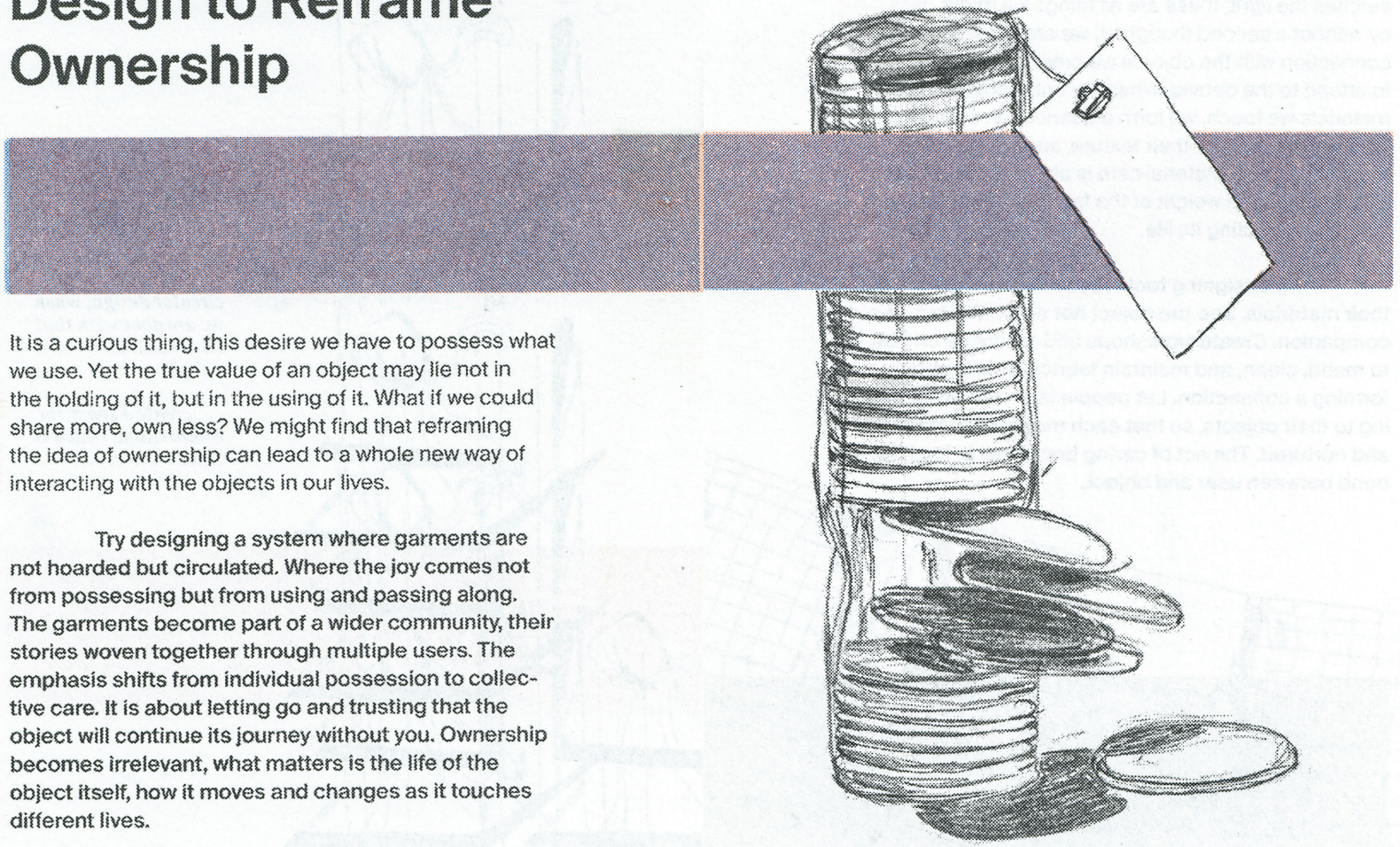


. . . finding like-minded souls and coming up with new models and new paradigms together is totally possible. . .

. . . my dream is community, my dream is emotional response. And then we try and do our best as designer to design that into what we do. . .

. . . we need something that's not building on top of what we are doing or what we have done. . .

Design to Reframe Ownership



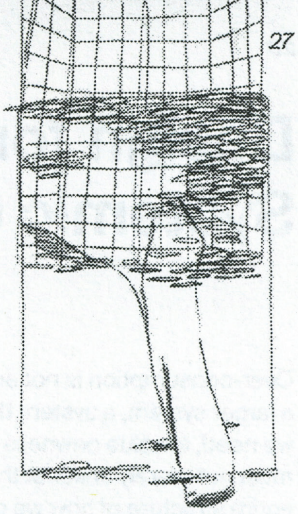
It is a curious thing, this desire we have to possess what we use. Yet the true value of an object may lie not in the holding of it, but in the using of it. What if we could share more, own less? We might find that reframing the idea of ownership can lead to a whole new way of interacting with the objects in our lives.

Try designing a system where garments are not hoarded but circulated. Where the joy comes not from possessing but from using and passing along. The garments become part of a wider community, their stories woven together through multiple users. The emphasis shifts from individual possession to collective care. It is about letting go and trusting that the object will continue its journey without you. Ownership becomes irrelevant, what matters is the life of the object itself, how it moves and changes as it touches different lives.

Design for Material Care

Sometimes, it seems, we forget to notice the things closest to us. The textures, the weight, the way fabric catches the light, these are all things we might pass by without a second thought. If we are to foster a true connection with the objects we create, we must learn to attend to the details. When we truly understand the materials we touch, we form a connection with them. We feel their weight, their texture, and we learn how to care for them. Material care is about slowing down, about feeling the weight of the fabric, understanding its texture, respecting its life.

Try designing tools to teach users to care for their materials. See the object not as a thing but as a companion. Create workshops and guidance on how to mend, clean, and maintain fabrics. This is about forming a connection. Let people learn the art of tending to their objects, so that each material is respected and nurtured. The act of caring becomes, in itself, a bond between user and object.

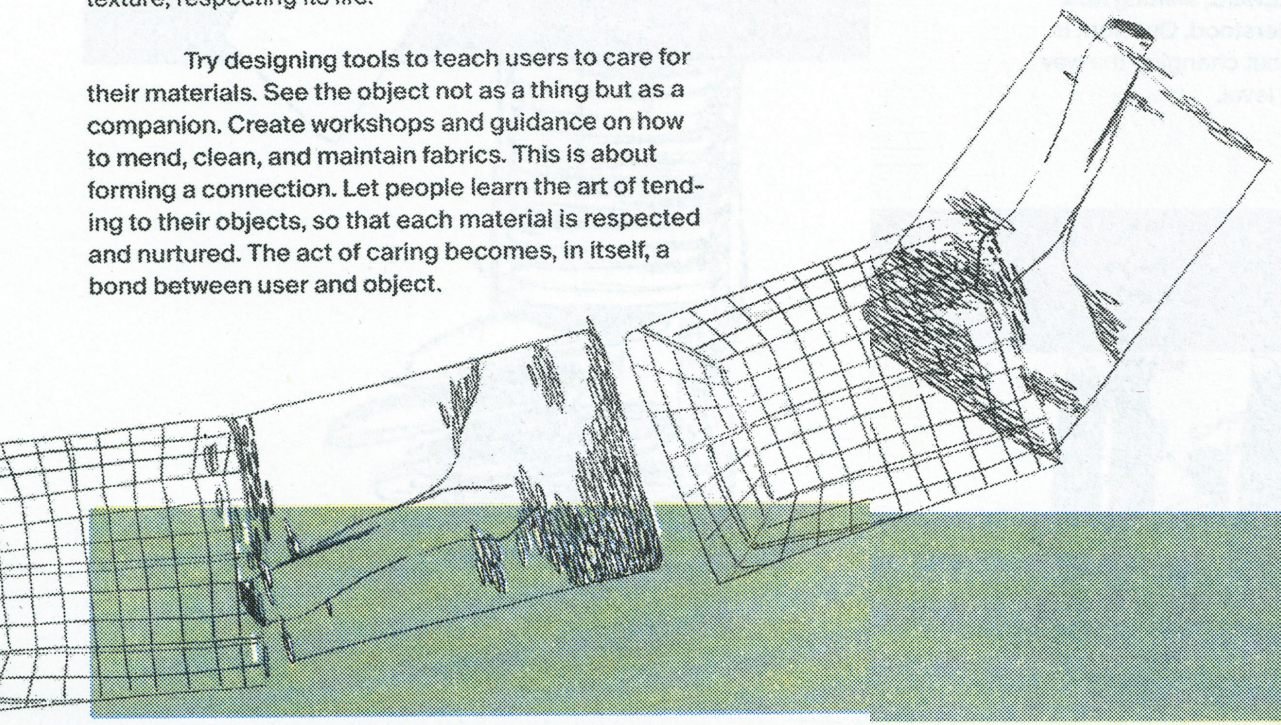


. . . it is micro actions that will empower professional designers to do something else. It will also empower consumers to relearn something. . .

. . . innovation becomes about everyday practices and hopefully it reduces the demand for materials. . .

. . . These are the sorts of skills that we need to tap into when we're beginning to think about change. They remind us about resourceful possibility and they help replace consumption with action. . .

. . . we have to re-look at what is actually giving value. . .

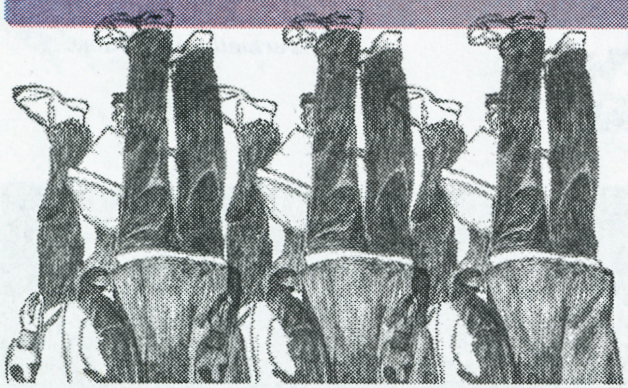


How do we design for under-consumption?

Design for Systemic Change

Over-consumption is not an isolated problem. It is tied to a larger system, a system that asks us to take more than we need, to value newness over care. We as designers must not merely tinker at the edges, but challenge the entire structure of how we consume and produce.

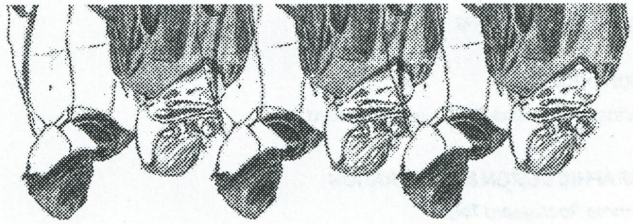
Try working with communities, with industries, with policymakers. Create designs that resist the logic of growth-driven consumption, that embrace slowness, care, and longevity. Partner with others to implement changes that ripple outward, shifting how fashion, how consumption, is understood. Our work is not just about the objects, it is about changing the way we think, the way we live, at every level.



How do we design for under-consumption?

. . . Can we begin to imagine what fashion might look like when consumerism isn't the strong narrative?. . .

. . . very rarely do we need technical solutions to the sustainability challenge. What we need are socio-political ones. . .



. . . using shame is a really problematic way to talk to people about changing behaviour. . .

. . . it's not achievable by the circular economy, because that's locked into a growth logic cycle itself. . .

. . . it's important just to keep in mind sometimes that capitalism is also a thought. It's something that was invented. . .

. . . we can do something about it because guess what: we're creative and that's what creative people do, we solve problems. . .

How do we design for under-consumption?

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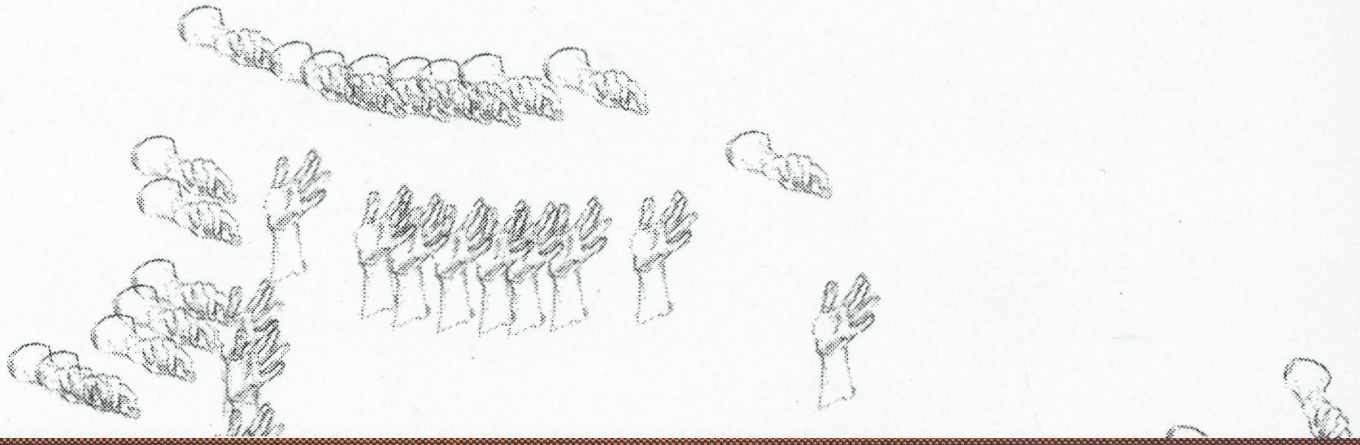
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